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RUEHMT/AMCONSUL MONTREAL PRIORITY 5325
RUEHCR/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 1694
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E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR
TAGS: PGDV, PREL, PINR, ETRD, CA
SUBJECT: LIBERAL SENATOR VAN ROGGEN BREAKS RANKS WITH
- TURNER ON FTA, RESIGNS COMMITTEE CHAIRMANSHIP

REF: (A) OTTAWA 6019; (B) OTTAWA 6049

1. (U) LIBERAL LEADER JOHN TURNER'S JULY 20 GAMBIT TO FORCE AN IMMEDIATE GENERAL ELECTION BY HOLDING UP THE FTA IMPLEMENTING LEGISLATION IN THE APPOINTIVE SENATE (REFTELS) SUFFERED A POLITICAL BLOW JULY 25 WHEN LIBERAL SENATOR GEORGE VAN ROGGEN OF B.C., CHAIRMAN OF THE SENATE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE, ANNOUNCED HIS CONTINUED OPPOSITION TO HIS PARTY CHIEF'S STANCE ON THE TRADE PACT. LONG A PUBLIC SUPPORTER OF FREE TRADE WITH THE U.S., VAN ROGGEN SAID HE WILL RESIGN THE COMMITTEE CHAIRMANSHIP HE HAS HELD FOR 14 YEARS AND STOP ATTENDING LIBERAL CAUCUS MEETINGS ON STRATEGY AND FTA ISSUES, ALTHOUGH HE INSISTS HIS "FRIENDSHIP" WITH TURNER WILL NOT BE AFFECTED.
2. (#) THE AMBASSADOR EARLIER GOT WIND OF VAN ROGGEN'S PLANNED ANNOUNCEMENT FROM A WELL-PLACED BUSINESS CONTACT, BUT THE TIMING OF THE SENATOR'S STATEMENT WAS EVIDENTLY HELD UP BY HIS HEALTH PROBLEMS. AS IT NOW HAPPENS, THE VAN ROGGEN REVELATION -- WHICH WAS NOT A TOTAL SURPRISE TO THOSE WHO KNOW HIM -- FOLLOWS CLOSE ON THE HEELS OF NDP LEADER ED BROADBENT'S EXCORIATION OF THE TURNER MOVE AS "ANTI-DEMOCRATIC" (REF B). LIBERAL SENATE LEADER ALLAN MACEACHEN, WHO HAS BACKED TURNER IN HIS UNPRECEDENTED TACTIC, HAS TAPPED TORONTO'S PETER BOSA AS ACTING COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN TO REPLACE VAN ROGGEN.

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3. (C) GEORGE VAN ROGGEN, 67, MAY BE JUST THE FIRST LIBERAL SENATOR TO REJECT TURNER'S RISKY GAMBIT TO FORCE AN ELECTION ON THE FTA ISSUE THROUGH THE HIGHLY CONTROVERSIAL TACTIC OF SENATE OBSTRUCTIONISM. NO OTHER SENATE GRIT HAS PUBLICLY BROKEN RANKS WITH THE LIBERAL LEADER ON THIS MATTER, BUT IT IS NO SECRET THAT MANY -- PARTICULARLY FROM QUEBEC -- SUPPORT THE FTA. LIBERAL SENATORS MAY ALSO QUESTION THE TURNER TACTIC BECAUSE IT COULD THREATEN THEIR SINECURES IN CANADA'S APPOINTIVE UPPER HOUSE IF IT RE-KINDLES PASSIONS TO ABOLISH OR REFORM THE SENATE. BUT IS IS UNLIKELY THAT MANY, IF ANY, OF THEM WILL JUMP SHIP WITH VAN ROGGEN ON EITHER THE CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUE OF SENATE OBSTRUCTIONISM OR THEIR PERSONAL SUPPORT FOR THE FTA. AS VAN ROGGEN TOLD REPORTERS, "AS FAR AS I KNOW, I AM ALONE."

NILES

END OF MESSAGE

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